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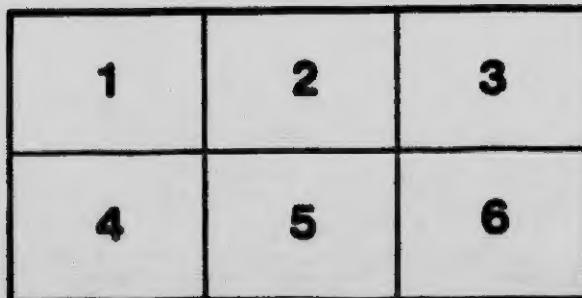
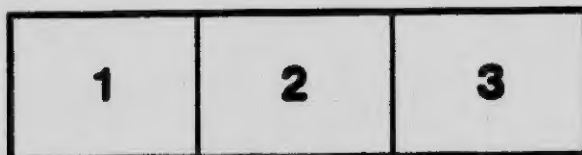
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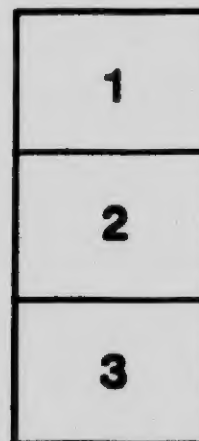
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# How Books May Help You

Robert W. H. Jones  
Education Council Library  
Vancouver, B.C.

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# **HOW BOOKS MAY HELP YOU**

**AN ADDRESS**

**BY**

**ROBERT W. DOUGLAS**

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**THE BURNARD PUBLISHING CO., LIMITED**

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## How Books May Help You



If certain records of the Victor Company are preserved forever the wonderful notes of a great Italian singer who has passed away from the living world. Although the singer himself will never again stand before you in the flesh, his marvellous voice may at will delight your ears and instruct your musical sense. Therefore these records are not dead things, but are living mementos of a personality precious to every lover of music.

In like manner certain symbols printed upon white paper form a record of the experiences, thoughts and life-histories of the greatest personalities in the world. These experiences, thoughts and life-histories may be read and studied by all of us without regard to age or sex. "A love fit for an emperor," as Anthony Trollope, the great novelist, says, "is your pass to the greatest, the purest, the most perfect pleasures that God has prepared for His creatures. It lasts when all other pleasures fade. It will support you when all other recreations are gone. It will last you until your death. It will make your hours pleasant to you as long as you live." Surely, if the point be well taken, we ought to lose no time and begin to study how best to make use of the mental riches to be found in books. It is certainly and lamentably true that a good many of us are fearfully ignorant of the method to be pursued in learning to read the classics, as the great books of the world are termed. Many of us consider the classics infinitely dull, and we find no message for our individual benefit in them. We would



be no doubt surprised if we were told that we did not know how to read them properly. But it would be true.

A Bishop of Durham, de Bury, was a great lover of books and he extolled them highly and enthusiastically, and his words have been preserved on the records, and may help us today. But he lived 500 years ago, when much of the great literature of today did not exist. For instance, in his day the novel had not appeared, although there was some light fiction. As regards poetry, he lived before Shakespeare, Milton, Scott, Byron or Shelley, to say nothing of more recent authors. Since then, too, we have had Darwin, Humboldt, Cook, Vancouver, Livingstone, Stanley and other great travellers and explorers. Natural history, astronomy, geology, geography and all the other sciences have been greatly extended and made more useful and interesting.

Today we have thousands of authors of all sorts, good, bad and indifferent; their names alone are the subject of whole volumes. In the face of this multitude, the most important question to ask yourself, be your profession what it may, is this: What books shall I read? Never, perhaps, has the right choice of books been more difficult than at present, and hence did it behoove more strongly every right-minded person to look well to the character of that which he reads. Today there are millions of records made by the great of all ages and they are at the service of those who would benefit by them. But the choice of books, like that of friends, is a serious duty. As Sir John Lubbock says: "We are as responsible for what we read as for what we do." A good book, in the noble words of Milton, "is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." Books are far from being dead things; on the contrary, they are instinct with the life of their authors. They endow us with a whole enchanted palace of thoughts. They can take

us out of the rut of a commonplace life and waft us to a region where small personal objects fade into insignificance, and the troubles and anxieties of the world are quite forgotten. Is not that a tremendous service to perform for us? I could quote thousands of heartfelt testimonies as to the service that books may render us. I shall confine myself to one only, that given us by the late Bret Harte. He pictures to us a rude mining camp in California in the early days, with, of course, the usual number of hard, reckless characters sitting around resting after an exhausting day's work.

"The roaring camp-fire with rude humor  
    painted the ruddy tints of health  
On haggard face and form that drooped and  
    fainted in the fierce race for wealth,  
Till one arose, and from his pack's scant  
    treasure a hoarded volume drew,  
And cards were dropped from hands of list-  
    less leis: to hear the tale anew;  
And then 'till 'round them shadows gath-  
    ered faster, and as the firelight fell,  
He read aloud the book wherein the Master  
    has writ of 'Little Nell.'  
Perhaps 'twas boyish fancy—for the reader  
    was youngest of them all—  
But, as he read, from clustering pine and  
    cedar a silence seemed to fall,  
The fir-trees gathering closer in the shadow,  
    listened in every spray,  
While the whole camp, with 'Nell' in English  
    meadows, wandered and lost their way."

No one can read a good and interesting book for an hour without being the better and the happier for it—not merely for the moment, but the memory remains with us. The books which produce this result upon us are the most useful of all. There are books which are no books, and to read which is a mere waste of time, while there are others so bad that we



cannot read them without a feeling of pollution. But, happily, they are not numerous and we need not be disturbed by them. By useful books I do not mean those only which will help a man in his business or profession. Those are exceedingly important, no doubt, but this service I do not consider by any means so necessary to our well-being as the ones which will elevate us into a region of lofty and disinterested thought, eliminating the commonplace in our lives and placing before us for emulation noble ideals and high aspirations. Philip Gilbert Hamerton, the artist, imagines the influence which the best sort of reading possesses for us in the following picture: "Suppose," he says, "a reader perfectly absorbed in his author, an author belonging, very likely, to another age and another civilization, entirely different from ours. Suppose him to be reading 'The Defence of Socrates,' in Plato, and have the whole scene before him as in a picture: The tribunal of the five hundred, the pure Greek architecture, the interested Athenian public, the odious Melitus, the envious enemies, the beloved and grieving friends whose names are dear to us and immortal; and in the centre you see one figure draped like a poor man, in cheap and common cloth that he wears winter and summer, with a face plain to downright ugliness, but an air of such genuine courage and self-possession that no acting could imitate it, and you hear the firm voice saying, 'The difficulty, my friends, is not in avoiding death, but in avoiding unrighteousness, for that runs faster than death.' You are just beginning the splendid paragraph where Socrates condemns himself to maintenance in the Prytaneum, and if you only can be safe from interruption till it is finished, you will have one of those noble minutes of noble pleasure which are the rewards of intellectual toil."

That imagined picture gives one a slight

idea of the high intellectual pleasure to be derived from the best books.

Books contain the history of our race, the discoveries we have made, the accumulated knowledge and experience of the ages. They picture for us the marvels and beauties of nature; they help us in our difficulties, comfort us in sorrow and in suffering, change hours of weariness into moments of delight, store our minds with ideas, fill them with good and happy thoughts which lift us out of ourselves. That being acknowledged, how is it that we have so few libraries, then, in our midst? How is it, too, that so few of us know how to read?—I mean, know how to read in the higher sense.

How much do you think we spend altogether on our libraries, public and private, as compared with what we spend upon our house furniture, our horses and automobiles? A mere bagatelle!

Roberts says in a recent work: "If a man spends lavishly on his library, you call him mad—a bibliomaniac. But you never call anyone a horse-maniac, though men ruin themselves every day by their horses, and you do not hear of people ruining themselves by their books. . . . We talk of food for the mind, as of food for the body. Now, a good book contains such food inexhaustibly; it is a provision for life, and for the best of us; yet how long most people would look at the best book before they would give the price of a large turbot for it! Though there have been men who have pinched their stomachs and bared their backs to buy a book, whose libraries were cheaper to them, I think, in the end than most men's dinners are. We are few of us put to such a trial, and more the pity; for, indeed, a precious thing is all the more precious to us if it has been won by work or economy; and if public libraries were half as costly as public dinners, or books cost the tenth part of what bracelets do, even foolish men and women might sometimes suspect there was good in

reading, as well as in munching and sparkling; and whereas the very cheapness of literature is making even wise people forget that if a book is worth reading it is worth buying."

"The truest owner of a library," says a well-known author, "is he who has bought each book for the love he bears to it—who is happy and content to say: 'Here are my jewels, my choicest material possessions'; who is proud to crown such assertion thus: 'I am content that this library shall represent the use of the talents given me by Heaven.' That man's library, though not commensurate with his love for books, will demonstrate what he has been able to accomplish with his resources; it will denote economy of living, eagerness to possess the particles that compose his library, and quick watchfulness to seize them when means and opportunities serve. Such a man has built a temple, of which each brick has been the subject of curious and acute intelligent examination and appreciation before it has been placed in the sacred building."

The late John Bright, the great English statesman, has this to say of the library:

"You may have in the house costly pictures and costly ornaments, and a great variety of decoration; yet, so far as my judgment goes, I would prefer to have one comfortable room well stocked with books to all you can give me in the way of decoration which the highest art can supply. The only subject of lamentation is—one feels that always, I think, in the presence of a library—that life is too short, and I am afraid I must say also that our industry is so far deficient that we seem to have no hope of a full enjoyment of the ample repeat that is spread before us. In the houses of the humble a little library, in my opinion, is a most precious possession."

Another Birmingham man, George Dawson, says:

"A library may be regarded as the solemn chamber in which a man can take counsel of

all that have been wise and great and good and glorious amongst the men that have gone before him. Now if we come down for a moment and look at the bare and immediate utilities of a library, we find that here a man gets himself ready for his calling, arms himself for his profession, finds out the facts that are to determine his trade, prepares himself for his examination. The utilities of it are endless and priceless. It is, too, a place of pastime, for man has no amusement more innocent, more sweet, more gracious, more elevating, and more fortifying than he can find in a library. . . . A library is the strengthener of all that is great in life, and the repeller of what is petty and mean; and half the gossip of society would perish if the books that were truly worth reading were read."

When we look through the houses of a large part of the middle classes of this country and the United States—it is not true to the same extent in England—what do we find? We often find fine furniture, good pictures, but few books; gorgeous adornments, the last word in luxury throughout the home, but great and useful books are almost the last things to be found there. Why is it so? When the mind is empty of those things that books alone can fill it with, then the seven devils of pettiness, frivolity, fashionableness, gentility, scandal, small slander, and the chronicling of small beer come in and take possession. Half of this nonsense would be dropped if men and women would only understand the elevating influences of their communing constantly with the lofty thoughts and high resolves of the greatest minds in books. Give the records a chance to make a great man of you! As Dr. Bury says: "Whosoever, therefore, claims to be zealous of truth, of happiness, of wisdom, of knowledge, aye, even of the faith, must needs become a lover of books."

As I said before, the most important question for you to ask yourself, be your profession

what it may, is this: "What books shall I read?" For him who has inclination to read there is no dearth of reading matter—there is an embarrassment of riches. Shall you read without discrimination whatever comes most readily to hand? I shall not attempt to answer that question, unless you can detect the answer in this further question: Are you ready to accept as a friend and companion every chance acquaintance whom you meet on the street? Of course not.

In the study of literature one should begin with an author and with a subject not too difficult to understand. A beginner will be likely to find little comfort in Chaucer, or Spenser, or even in Shakespeare; but after he has worked up to them he may study them with unbounded delight.

For the ready understanding and correct appreciation of the masterpieces of English literature, a knowledge of Greek and Roman mythology and history is almost indispensable. The great works of the world's master minds should be studied with some reference to the similarity of their subject-matter. For example, the reading of Shakespeare will give occasion to the study of dramatic literature in all its forms. The reading of "Paradise Lost" will introduce us to the great epics, and to heroic poetry in general. Sir Walter Scott's "Lay of the Last Minstrel" will lead naturally to the romance literature of modern and mediæval times. Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" fitly illustrates the story-telling phase of poetry; the study of lyric poetry may centre upon the old ballads, the sonnets, the love songs and the religious hymns of our language. Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" introduces us to allegory, and Milton's "Lycidas" to elegiac and pastoral poetry. To know the best specimens of argumentative prose we should begin with some of the great speeches of such men as Burke, Daniel Webster, Gladstone, and end with the orations of Demosthenes.

There are perhaps a score or so books which should be read and studied by everyone who claims the title of reader; but, aside from these, each person should determine, through a process of rigid self-examination, what course of reading and what books are likely to produce the most profitable results to him. Find out, if possible, what is your special bent of mind. What line of inquiry or investigation is most congenial to your taste or mental capacity? Having determined this question, let your reading all centre upon that topic of study which you have made your own until you have exhausted its interest, then choose another. And once having acquired the reading habit, what happiness is yours! For you the world is quite transformed, a different world altogether from what it was with your limited sight, your narrow experience, your contracted habits. Now, your society is the whole world. You can live with the great and the mighty, drink their thoughts and take fellowship and rank according to your desire. And what an illimitable prospect spreads out before you! Alexander Smith, the author of a little-known book, "Dreamthorpe," filled with enthusiasm over the possibilities of his library, eloquently expresses his appreciation as follows: "I go into my library, and all history unrolls before me. I breathe the morning air of the world while the scent of Eden's roses yet lingers on it, while it vibrates only to the world's first brood of nightingales and the laugh of Eve. I see the Pyramids building; I hear the shouting of the army of Alexander; I feel the ground shake beneath the march of Cambyses. I sit as in a theatre—the stage is time; the play is the play of the world. What a spectacle it is! What kingly pomp! What processions file past, what cities burn to heaven, what crowds of captives are dragged at the chariot wheels of conquerors! I hiss, or cry 'Bravo!' when the great actors come on, shaking the stage. I am a Roman emperor when I look at a Roman



coin. I lift Homer, and I shout with Achilles in the trenches. The silence of the unpeopled Assyrian plains, the outcomings and ingoings of the patriarchs, Abraham and Ishmael, Isaac in the fields at eventide, Rebekah at the well, Jacob's guile, Esau's face reddened by desert heat, Joseph's splendid funeral procession—all these things I find within the boards of my Old Testament. What a silence in those old books as of a half-peopled world—what bleating of flocks, what green pastoral rest, what indubitable human existence. Across brawling centuries of blood and war I hear the bleating of Abraham's flocks, the tinkling of the bells of Rebekah's camels. O men and women so far separated yet so near, so strange yet so well known, by what miraculous power do I know you all? Books are the true Elysian fields, where the spirits of the dead converse, and into these fields a mortal may venture unappalled. What king's court can boast such company, what school of philosophy such wisdom? The wit of the ancient world is glancing and flashing there. There is Pan's pipe, there are the songs of Apollo. Seated in my library at night, and looking on the silent faces of my books, I am occasionally visited by a strange sense of the supernatural. They are not collections of printed pages, they are ghosts. I take down one and it speaks with me in a tongue not now heard on earth, and of men and things of which it alone possesses knowledge. I call myself a solitary, but sometimes I think I misapply the term. No man sees more company than I do. I travel with mightier cohorts around me than did ever Timour or Genghis Khan on their fiery marches. I am a sovereign in my library, but it is the dead, not the living, that attend my levees."

Wondrous indeed are the virtues and powers of books. Alexander Smith evidently knew well how to enjoy them or he could not have written so enthusiastically about their services to him.

That brings me to a matter which I consider of great importance. Very few people know how to read the great books even if they have the opportunity. They will read the daily papers and the magazines, full of somewhat scrappy misinformation, but the great books of the world somehow do not appeal to them. It is not always because of sheer laziness, but I think it is mainly owing to the fact that they do not really know how to read them and to extract the exquisite pleasure waiting for them in the best books. Arnold Bennett, the English novelist, has plainly perceived the difficulty, and in a recent work, written not so much to teach you how to make the most of literature, as to show you how to enjoy life, he takes a great classic and proceeds to teach you how to enjoy it. At the outset he tells you with emphasis that "Your taste has to pass before the bar of the classics." That is the point. If you differ with a classic it is you who are wrong, and not the book. If you differ with a modern work, you may be wrong or you may be right, but no judge is authoritative enough to decide. Your taste is unformed. It needs guidance, and it needs authoritative guidance. You probably will not care for a particular classic at first. If you did care for it at first, your taste, so far as that particular classic is concerned, would be formed, and our hypothesis is that your taste is not formed. Then how are you to arrive at the stage of caring for it? Chiefly, of course, by examining it and honestly trying to understand it. But this process is materially helped by an act of faith, by the frame of mind which says: "I know on the highest authority that this thing is fine, and it is capable of giving me pleasure. Hence I am determined to find pleasure in it."

Believe me that faith counts enormously in the development of that wide taste which is the instrument of wide pleasures. But it

must be faith founded on unassailable authority.

Mr. Bennett takes Charles Lamb as his exemplar for various reasons. He is a good writer, wide in his appeal, of a highly sympathetic temperament, and his finest achievements are simple and very short. Now your natural tendency will be to think of Charles Lamb as a book because he has arrived at the stage of being a classic. Charles Lamb was a man, not a book. The book is nothing but the expression of the man. The book is nothing but the man trying to talk to you, trying to impart to you some of his feelings. An experienced student will divine the man from the book, will understand the man by the book, as is logically proper. But the beginner will do well to aid himself in understanding the book by means of independent information about the man. He will at once relate the book to something human, and strengthen in his mind the essential notion of the connection between literature and life. Therefore it will be necessary to refer to some short life of Charles Lamb, like, for instance, Ainger's biography, which can be had at a modest price. After you have read it carefully you will have formed a mental picture of Charles Lamb as a man. In the light of that picture then read "Dream Children: A Reverie," one of the most celebrated of the Essays of Elia. Bennett says that you are to consider "Dream Children" as a human document. Lamb was nearing fifty when he wrote it. You can see especially from the last line, that the death of his elder brother, John Lamb, was fresh and heavy on his mind. You will recollect that in youth he had had a disappointing love affair with a girl named Ann Simmons, who afterwards married a man named Bartram. You will know that one of the influences of his childhood was his Grandmother Field at Blakesware House in Hertfordshire, at which mansion he sometimes spent his holidays. You will know that he was

a bachelor, living with his sister Mary, who was subject to homicidal mania. And you will see in this essay primarily a supreme expression of the increasing loneliness of his life. He constructed all that preliminary tableau of paternal pleasure in order to bring home to you in the most emphatic way his feeling of the solitude of his existence, his sense of all that he had missed and lost in the world.

As I said, the key is one of profound sadness. But note well that he makes his sadness beautiful, or rather he shows the beauty that resides in sadness. You watch him sitting there in his "bachelor arm-chair" and you say to yourself: "Yes, it was sad, but it was somehow beautiful." When you have said that to yourself, Charles Lamb, as far as you are concerned, has accomplished his chief aim in writing the essay. How exactly he produces his effect can never be fully explained. But one reason of his success is certainly his regard for truth. He does not falsely idealize his brother, nor the relations between them. He does not say as a sentimentalist would have said: "Not the slightest cloud ever darkened our relations," nor does he exaggerate his solitude. Being a sane man he has too much common sense to assemble all his woes at once.

Another reason for his success is his continual regard for beautiful things and fine actions, as illustrated in the major characteristics of his grandmother and his brother, and in the detailed description of Blakesware House and its gardens.

Then, subordinate to the main purpose, is the picture of the children—real children until the moment when they fade away. The traits of childhood are accurately put in again and again. Incidentally, while preparing his ultimate solemn effect, Charles Lamb has inspired you with a new, intensified vision of the wistful beauty of children—their imitativeness, their facile and generous emotions, their anxiety to be correct, their ingenious haste to

escape from grief into joy. You can see these children almost as clearly and as tenderly as Lamb saw them. For days afterwards you will not be able to look upon a child without recalling Lamb's portrayal of the grace of childhood. He will have shared with you his perception of beauty. If you possess children he will have renewed for you the charm which custom does very decidedly stale.

And having read the essay, if you reflect upon it, you will see how its emotional power over you has sprung from the sincere and unexaggerated expression of actual emotions exactly remembered by someone who had an eye always open for beauty. The beauty of old houses and gardens and aged, virtuous characters, the beauty of children, the beauty of companionships, the softening beauty of dreams in an arm-chair—all these are brought together and mingled with the grief and regrets which were the origin of the mood. Why, then, is "Dream Children" a classic? It is a classic because it transmits to you distinguished emotions, because it makes you respond to the throb of life more intensely, more justly and more nobly. And it is capable of doing this because Charles Lamb had a very distinguished, a very sensitive and a very honest mind. He felt so keenly that he was obliged to find relief in imparting his emotions. And his mental processes were so sincere that he could neither exaggerate nor diminish the truth. If he had lacked any one of these three qualities, his appeal would have been narrowed and weakened, and he would not have become a classic. He forces you to understand, and because of this power his work is great and he is a classic.

I have dwelt upon this matter at some length because so few people in reading ever try to analyze why a certain kind of reading repels them and certain other kinds have a strange attraction. In other words, they read without making use of their reason-

ing powers at all, and much of the value obtained by reading is wholly lost. Read with discrimination and care the best books and you will soon learn to love the great classics of our language and they will give you perpetual pleasure.

Let me say at this stage, if you think that you have any dislike of poetry you must overcome it. Some people seem to have a profound objection and dislike of poetry. You will find everywhere men who read very widely in prose who simply will not touch poetry at all. Why? English literature is the richest in poetry of all the literatures in the world. Verse is the highest form of expression, and yet if you ask the average lettered man if he reads poetry he will, ten times out of twelve, answer you in the negative. Stranger still, the average lettered man does not truly dislike poetry; he only dislikes it when it takes a certain form. He will read poetry and enjoy it provided he is not aware that it is poetry. It must be concealed in prose and then he will probably appreciate it. The greatest poetry is in verse, and verse is identified with the very greatest poetry. Such poetry can only be understood and appreciated by people who have put themselves through a considerable mental discipline. Therefore, to enjoy the greatest poetry you must get rid of any prejudices you may feel against verse and instruct yourself in the methods of reading it. Once having learned the right way to read verse, no other kind of literature will afford you higher pleasure.

Understand me, I do not mean by this the more difficult poetry, the greatest idealists in verse whom it needs a concentrated study to master. Some of this verse is hard to all men and at all seasons. Dante, for instance, in his way, reaches to depths far below most philosophies, and consequently is hard reading. He is the most prophetic of all poets, in whose epic the panorama of mediæval life, of feudalism at its best, and Christianity at its best, stands



as in a microscope, transfigured, judged and measured. And Frederic Harrison says that "Paradise Lost," with all its mighty music and its idyllic pictures of human nature, of our first child-parents in their naked purity and their awakening thought, is a serious and ungrateful task—not to be ranked with the simple enjoyments; it is a possession only to be acquired by habit. The great religious poets, the imaginative teachers of the heart, are never easy reading. But the reading of them is a religious habit rather than an intellectual effort. I pass all these by. I have been talking of the books from which we can easily obtain enjoyment. Books that we can laugh over and weep over, and learn from, and laugh over or weep over again. Books which have in them humor, truth, human nature in all its sides, pictures of the great phases of human history, and withal, sound teaching in honesty, manliness, gentleness and patience. Of such books, I say, books accepted by the voice of all mankind as matchless and immortal, there is a complete library at hand for every man in his every mood, whatever his taste or his requirements.

Masterlinck, in one of his wonderful essays called "The Deeper Life," says that we must learn to live in a beauty, an earnestness that shall have become a part of ourselves. In life there is no creature so degraded but knows full well which is the noble and beautiful thing that he should do; but this noble and beautiful thing is not strong enough within him. It is this invisible and abstract strength that it must be our endeavor to increase first of all. And this strength increases only in those who have acquired the habit of resting, more frequently than others, upon the summits where life absorbs the soul, upon the heights when we see that every act and every thought are infallibly bound up with something great and immortal. Look upon men and things with the inner eye, never forgetting that the shadow they throw as they pass by, upon hillock or

well, is but the fleeting image of a mightier shadow, which like the wing of an imperishable swan floats over every soul that draws near to their soul.

Do not believe that thoughts such as these can be mere ornaments and without influence upon the lives of those who admit them. These thoughts of which I speak make up the secret treasure of heroism, and on the day that life compels us to disclose this treasure we are startled to find therein no forces other than those by which we are impelled towards perfect beauty. Then it is no longer necessary that a great king should die for us to remember that the world does not end at the household door, and not an evening passes but the smallest thing suffices to ennoble the soul.

Books have a daily and perpetual value in helping us to realise such a life as that described by Maeterlinck in his essay. We have to live with them and in them, till their ideal world habitually surrounds us in the midst of the real world; that their great thoughts have to stir us daily anew, and their generous passion has to warm us hour by hour. This gold, as Frederic Harrison says, refined beyond the standard of the goldsmith, these pearls of great price, the united voice of mankind has assured us are found in those immortal works of every age and of every race whose names are household words throughout the world. A lifetime will hardly suffice us to know, as they ought to be known, these great masterpieces of man's genius. I take a few of them, almost at random, and I should like to ask you readers how well do you know them? Homer, Virgil, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Dante, Ariosto, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Moliere, Corneille, Milton, Fielding, Goethe, Dickens, Scott. Of course most of you have read these great writers, but how many of you have read them with discrimination and care, absorbing the whole meaning?

Take Fielding's "Tom Jones," for instance,

the book that was ordered to be destroyed the other day by some members of the Library Board of Doncaster, England. Fielding, as Harrison calls him, is "the prose Homer of human nature." How many of us realize in "Tom Jones" the beauty of unselfishness, the well-spring of goodness, the manly healthiness and heartiness underlying its frolic and its satire which the book inculcates, because we are absorbed, it may be, in laughing at its humor, or are simply irritated by its grossness. Therefore I say again, as I have said many times before, a great classic must be read with understanding, with a clear mind, without narrow prejudice, and then it will have a message for you—never otherwise.

It is the fashion for some people to say today that Walter Scott is a back number, that his prose is bad, that his poetry is worse, that nobody should waste time over an author who has so falsified history as he has done. Well, it all may be true, but I doubt it. Walter Scott is an author of whom I never grow tired. He is a perfect library in himself. A constant reader of romances would find that it needed months to go through even the best pieces of the inexhaustible painter of eight full centuries and every type of man, and he might repeat the process of reading him ten times in a lifetime without a sense of weariness or sameness. As Frederic Harrison well says: "The poetic beauty of Scott's creations is almost the least of his great qualities." It is the universality of his sympathy that is so truly great, the justice of his estimates, the insight into the spirit of each age, his intense absorption of self in the vast epic of human civilization. As in Homer himself, we see in this prose Iliad of modern history the battle of the old and the new, the heroic defence of ancient strongholds, the long impending and inevitable doom of mediaeval life. Strong men and proud women struggle against the destiny of modern society, unconsciously working out its ways, un-

dauntedly defying its power. How just is our Island Homer! Neither Greek nor Trojan sways him; Achilles is his hero; Hector is his favorite; he loves the counsels of chiefs, and the palace of Priam; but the swineherd, the charioteer, the slave girl, the hound, the beggar, and the herdsman all glow alike in the harmonious coloring of his peopled epic. We see the dawn of our English nation, the defence of Christendom against the Koran, the grace and terror of feudalism, the rise of monarchy out of baronies, the rise of parliaments out of monarchy, the rise of industry out of serfage, the pathetic ruin of chivalry, the splendid death struggle of Catholicism, the sylvan tribes of the mountain — remnants of our prehistoric forefathers — beating themselves to pieces against the hard advance of modern industry. We see the grim heroism of the Bible martyrs, the catastrophe of feudalism overwhelmed by a practical age which knows little of its graces and almost nothing of its virtues. Such, I say, is Walter Scott. A "back number" forsooth! This glorious and most human and most historical of writers, without whom our very conception of human development would have been forever imperfect. No, Walter Scott is too great a genius ever to become a "back number," and any man who cannot perceive his transcendent qualities is very deficient himself in mental equipment.

And what shall I say of Charles Dickens, the greatest novelist that the world has ever bred? I should like to tell you what he has done for me, personally; how strong and sweet his influence has ever been and will continue to be as long as life lasts. If it be the soul that makes men rich or poor, he who has given the world a truer conception of beauty, which is the body of truth, as love is its spirit, has done more for the happiness of his country and to secure its freedom than if he had doubled its defences or its revenues. He who has taught a man to look kindly upon a flower or an insect

has thereby made him sensible of the beauty of tenderness towards men, and rendered charity and loving-kindness so much the more easy and so much the more necessary to him. To make life more sacred in the eyes of the refined and educated may be a noble ambition in the scholar and the poet, but to reveal to the poor and ignorant and degraded those divine arms of the eternal beauty which encircle them lovingly by day and night, to teach them the essential doctrine that we are all children of one mother, and the nearer, haply, to her heart for the very want and wretchedness which half-persuaded them that they were orphan and forgotten. This truly has been the task and the labor of love of "the Good Genie of Fiction," Charles Dickens. Some day I hope to tell you of my studies into the immortal works of that author. If I could but influence a single soul to go to Charles Dickens for his inspiration and his human sympathy, I should not think my work wasted.

The proper appreciation of the great books of the world is the reward of life-long study. You must work up to them, and unconsciously you will become trained to find great qualities in what the world has decided is great. When you have reached that stage your lot is indeed a happy one. The only cloud before you then is the brevity of life. Nothing else matters.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your attention.



